

## THE TOWN OF BLUBBER BAY

Arriving at Blubber Bay today it's hard to imagine the vibrant community that once thrived there. The settlement blossomed after 1910 when Pacific Lime Company took over the limestone and sawmill operations.

A visitor would disembark the Canadian Pacific *Princess Mary*, step onto the wooden plank wharf, walk between the two tall "PL" stone pillars and continue uphill beside the beautiful arbutus-lined Chinese rockeries to the town above.

The company town consisted initially of two rows of houses for married employees, painted alternately green and brown. Most had three bedrooms and a small yard with a woodshed and fruit trees (some still there today). Picket fences surrounded the gardens, including a community garden tended by the Chinese who lived in the bunkhouses below.



Each morning the bell in the school tower would ring, hurrying the children down the tree-lined streets. The 35 to 40 students (grades 1 to 8 in one room) were responsible for classroom maintenance and supplying the wood heater which, no doubt, worked overtime when the inkwells froze overnight! Older boys would vie for the honour of pulling the ropes to sound the 600 pound bell, originally from the steamship *Empress of Japan*.

Opening in 1923, the company store and post office supplied most needs. The wooden floor, old-fashioned weigh scales and butcher paper rolls were typical of the day. Flour came in pretty sacks that could be refashioned into tea towels or small dresses.

After the mines in Van Anda closed in 1919, Blubber Bay became Texada's social centre. The school doubled as a community hall where Friday night movies and Saturday night dances became popular, even attracting "overseas" (Stillwater and Myrtle Point) revellers.

Active community groups arranged potlucks (bean suppers were popular), picnics, maypole dances, strawberry festivals and theatre productions. Blubber Bay's ball field was the best on the island and supported several teams. Children could swim in the wading pool, play tennis or roam unsupervised amongst the fascinating industrial installations. The 5:00 pm Powell River mill whistle signalled dinnertime.

The town died when the kilns shut down (1961) and buildings were later dismantled. "That Place" cafe is one of the few houses remaining today to remind us of the important community that once was Blubber Bay.